

THE LAST PORTRAIT OF AUDUBON, TOGETHER  
WITH A LETTER TO HIS SON.

BY DR. R. W. SHUFELDT AND MISS M. R. AUDUBON.

*Plate IX.*

It is the celebrated artist Cruikshank to whom the honor is due for having made the first published portrait of America's well-beloved ornithologist — Audubon. The naturalist at that time was about forty years of age and the picture, now destroyed by fire, was a miniature. Inman also succeeded in obtaining a fine portrait of him, which is the one that was reproduced in his *Biography*. His son John secured still another, one of the most valuable now in existence, it being a full-length with his favorite dog at his feet. These three portraits have been published and republished as engravings at various times and in various places, so that they are now well-known to all the many readers of *Audubonian* literature. A thus far unpublished and another greatly cherished portrait of the naturalist has been described in 'Scribner's Magazine' for July, 1876 (p. 335). This, too, was painted by the fond hand of the same son who painted the full-length picture, to which we have referred above. Finally, by the aid of a mirror, Audubon made a small oil-painting of himself, and this picture has already been reproduced in the pages of the present magazine, with a description of it.<sup>1</sup> By those who have seen it, and by members of the family, his immediate descendants, this last has been pronounced an excellent likeness. The original is the property of Mrs. E. C. Walker, of Baton Rouge, La., and is the earliest portrait of the naturalist known to us.

It is now the aim of the authors of the present contribution to bring before the many readers of 'The Auk' what proves to be a portrait of Audubon heretofore not given to the world. In one way, at least, it is of greater value and interest than any of the other portraits extant, — priceless as they really are. The

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<sup>1</sup>'The Auk,' Vol. III, No. 4, October, 1886, pp. 417-420. The portrait was awarded the frontispiece.

special superiority claimed for it lies in the fact, that it is a *camera-portrait*, and consequently portrays its every line true to life. It was not so very long ago when one of the writers of this article discovered in the possession of Professor T. W. Smillie, the well-known photographer of the United States National Museum of Washington, a daguerreotype of Audubon, that belonged to Mrs. Grimshaw, a daughter of Mrs. Nicholas Berthoud, and a niece of Mrs. Audubon's, who had placed the treasure on deposit in the above-named institution. Mrs. Grimshaw kindly consented to our having a photographic copy made of this daguerreotype, which was accomplished through the consummate skill of Professor Smillie, and with the courteous permission of Doctor G. Brown Goode, the distinguished officer in charge of the National Museum. From this excellent photograph has been made the admirable plate which illustrates the present paper. A picture so fine as this one surely requires no comments on the part of its contributors to 'The Auk'; it has but to be seen by any of its readers to be admired. From all that we have been able to gather, it would seem that this daguerreotype was taken by Brady of New York City some time during the summer of 1850. As the naturalist was born, as near as we have been enabled to ascertain the date, some time in May, 1780, and died on the 27th of January, 1851, this picture must have been obtained when he was in the seventieth year of his age, and at a period only a few months prior to his death. With the view of obtaining as full a history of it as possible, we recently placed ourselves in communication with the Rev. Dr. A. Gordon Bakewell of New Orleans, La., one of the most charming of the old-school divines of the Episcopal church, who is a son of Thomas Bakewell, and was a favorite cousin of the late John Woodhouse Audubon, the father of the co-author of the present article.

Doctor Bakewell writes us that Mrs. Gordon, one of Mrs. J. J. Audubon's sisters, just before her death, presented the daguerreotype to Mrs. Grimshaw, and that the former received it direct from the wife of the naturalist. "It was the last picture taken from life shortly before Mr. Audubon died, and it certainly is very like him, when I last saw him toward the latter end of his earthly journey."

These quoted words of Doctor Bakewell's complete, in so far as facts go, all we have been enabled to gather in regard to the actual history of this portrait. In placing it here, we not only give ourselves great pleasure, but we do more, for we add still another to the list of the published portraits of that one of this country's celebrated naturalists whose fame augments *pari passu* with the march of time.

Standing next in value to published Audubonian portraits are published Audubonian letters, and we feel that it hardly requires any apology from us, when we say that we know of no more fitting way to conclude this article than by adding to it a hitherto unpublished letter of Audubon's, addressed to his son John W. Audubon, 4 Wimpole Street, Cavendish Square, London. It will be seen upon perusal that this letter is brimful of interest, both of a personal and an historical nature. It reads as follows:—

“*Edinburgh, July 1st, 1838, Sunday.*

“MY DEAREST FRIENDS

“Your joint letter of the 27th Wednesday, did not reach me until yesterday afternoon, probably because the steamer which brought it did not leave London on that evening on  $\frac{9}{10}$  of the coronation etc., Here the festivals were poor beyond description, and although scarcely anything was to be seen, the whole population was on foot the entire day, and nearly the whole night, gazing at each other like lost sheep.—No illuminations except at two shops, Mr. Henderson's and another close by him.—The fireworks at the castle consisted merely of about one hundred rockets, not a gun was fired from the batteries. Mac-Gillivray & I went to see the fireworks at 10 P. M, and soon returned disgusted.—His museum (College of Surgeons) and the Edinburgh Museum were thrown open *gratis*, and were thronged to excess. Upwards of 20000 in the first, and about 25000 in the other; all was however quite orderly. The day was showery; cloudy and dismal at times, but the evening was clear and fine.—Mr. Hill's father died on the morning of the 27th and I have not seen Alex. H., since. Many thanks to Maria for her bunch of letters, and the few lines of her own to me, I hope that everything will go on well with you all.

“We begin printing *tomorrow 2d of July, 1838!!* remember that Mesdames et Messieurs! and I intend to proceed with all possible despatch and care. *All* the birds in rum will be inspected as far as internal or digestive organs, trachea &c are concerned, and as I am constantly present in the dissecting room, I think I shall know something about the matter anon.— I am almost in hopes to see Victor tomorrow night but cannot be sure. There are somewhere at home the nests of the birds found on the Columbia by Nuttall and Townsend, I believe that of Bewick’s Wren is among them; send them *all*, very carefully packed. I want the journal of my first trip to the Floridas, which was cut out of my large leather journal, previous to going to Labrador, also a letter on the habits of the Yellow-bellied Cuckoo, by a gentleman at Charleston. If it cannot be found perhaps Maria will recollect his name, being a friend of John Bachman, if so send me that, *in full*, if possible. It is the gentleman in whose garden I procured the small and large cuckoos in the same nest.—

“I have written fortyfour articles for my appendix and will continue whenever I am not otherwise engaged, so as to save time at last.—I am sorry for the death of poor Wickliffe but glad that his brother was with him at New York previously, and that we, at least, have done all we could for him. MacGillivray is quite well, and works very hard, poor fellow—I am glad of John’s repainting the head by VanDyke, two copies of such heads are valuable to him, besides his improving by so working—When Victor has left for this place, John must pay much attention to the colourers and call also on the book binder. Havell ought to exert himself in having some 4th vols; delivered as soon as possible.

“My last letter which was written last Sunday, was put too late in the office, which closed on that day at two o’clock, and did not therefore leave this till four o’clock on Monday afternoon; this one will have a better chance, for I will take it myself to the general office. I have seen no one hardly since my last, I am indeed as busily engaged as ever, and rarely go to bed before eleven—being with Mr. MacGillivray until generally past ten, describing etc., I rise at four or earlier, he at ten; but I go to bed at eleven, he at two. I discovered that he was adverse to the examination of the intestinal canals etc.,

because many of my birds which are common to both countries will be published before his 2d vol., can now possibly be; but as soon as I told him that I had already said in my introduction, that the anatomical structure was declared to be *his*, he was much pleased and began on the instant.

“Today is very dismal, and it will rain probably until night; I wish we had here some of the warm weather of which dearest Mamma speaks. I have had but one walk to Arthur’s Seat, but now and then I stroll to the meadows which are close to me, and now look well.—From the window of my sitting room I overlook the garden of Mr. Frazer our printer, and now and then speak to him there, I have not yet however visited him.—I will recollect the Queen’s farthing when next I see Professor Wilson, but doubt much if he will recollect the least idea of it. Has Charley written or said anything to Victor about the review of the work; remember me to Healey.—

“I suppose that the crown of England sits very quietly down, and that all was very superfine. I have not so much as seen a paper since I left you.

“God bless you all, dearest friends, take good care of Mamma and Maria.

“Ever your firmly attached father and friend

“J. J. AUDUBON.

“No. 7 Archibald Place,  
*Lauriston.*”

Up to the present time there has been no personal letter of Audubon’s published which so clearly shows, as this one does, the precise relations between Macgillivray and himself. Although it testifies to the fact that the former is entirely responsible for the anatomical descriptions of ‘The Birds of America,’ it likewise goes to show that Audubon took a lively and personal interest in a great many of those dissections, and, in all probability, was often at Macgillivray’s side while they were being made, — not as a mere looker-on, but to follow him with that keen intelligence during their progress which characterized his every undertaking in the science he loved so well, and in which he has made a name as enduring as the great truths in the foundation upon which modern ornithology itself is reared.